



C.B.R.C. TORCH
A publication of the
Central Blind Rehabilitation Center
Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital

Summer 2012



"Let it light the pathways of the blind, that their dignity may be restored."

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We are making an effort to improve the accessibility of the TORCH and have implemented some new visually impaired friendly features in this issue. The Table of Contents below, incorporates a software feature that allows e-readers to float the curser over the list of articles and use the commands “control and click” to quickly link to the article within the publication without having to scroll along line for line, page for page until you locate it. We hope our computer savvy, and, not so computer savvy readers find this option helpful.

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Mission Statement

The mission of the Blind Rehabilitation Center is to provide high quality blind rehabilitation service through the provision of a broad range of programs. As the rehabilitation needs of the blind and visually impaired population change, it is the Center’s intent to be at the forefront and a recognized leader in the development and implementation of the individualized treatment modalities, health care and prosthetic devices. Its primary goal is to provide the skills and training with equipment necessary for independence. Specialty programs such as computer access training, electronic travel aids and electronic reading machines are provided to eligible veterans. Public education, including the Family Training Program, is directed at improving the level of understanding to the general public.

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Chief's Message

Facility Updates and Improvements



Our facility received some enhancements this year, some that spoke to our mission in educating the public to our purpose, others supported the teaching environment and some just added some comforts of home.

Skill area posters were developed, printed, and are now displayed in the hallways of our center. Predominantly on the 2nd floor training area, the posters provide a brief explanation of what each skill area teaches and how it aids in rehabilitation of a visually impaired individual. These posters come in especially helpful when visitors tour our Center. We can give an informative explanation without interrupting classes.



We also increased our training space in Living Skills and Computer Access Training this year. Sound absorbing panels have been installed to efficiently divide classroom space into several small training areas providing storage, privacy and a sense of personal work space for both Veterans and Staff.

We have helped enhance our Manual Skills Program with some new equipment to help personalize veteran's training activities. See our Performance Improvement article for all the details.

We have been moving forward with developing our Telehealth program, which will allow for educational and rehabilitation opportunities via audio video connection to sister Blind Centers, VA Facilities and Outpatient Clinics where our Veterans meet with their VIST Coordinator. Establishment of the logistics, equipment and contacts is a significant undertaking and requires the cooperation of the other sites that we would communicate with. All of VA Blind Rehab is working to get this new education/rehabilitation teaching modality up and running some time this year.

Equally important on the facility updates, the Patient Dining Room was updated with a coffee-bar at the South end of the room along with additional lounge seating to enjoy that fresh cup of Jo. (see photo page 3)

New refrigerators in both the patient dining room kitchen and newly installed coffee bar were also enhancements for patient comfort this year.



We are looking forward to our summer recreation program which always seems to pick up speed just a bit with summer recreation activities in Chicago. Much is planned; contact your VIST Coordinator if you are interested in any nationally sponsored events.

Performance Improvement Department Updates; enhancing training assignments in Manual Skills

By Jennifer Molodecki



A new piece of equipment has been purchased in the Manual Skills (MS) department – the *Universal Laser Engraver*. Its purpose is to provide additional options for enhancing a veteran's rehab training assignment in the multiple media areas of Manual Skills. Since its arrival to the Blind Rehabilitation Center in mid-November 2011, staff have been trained and continue to experiment with the potential use in veteran programs. It has actively been incorporated for personalizing activities, but it will not be used every time. It can engrave and etch from letters to images and logos as well as cut through materials ¼ inch thick. Possible materials used with the engraver include: soft and hard wood, acrylic, aluminum, painted brass & other coated metal, cork, glass, leather, marble, paper, micro-surfaced plastic, and even meat (However, for cleanliness no meat or other food will be utilized in the

engraver). Some examples of items enhanced by the engraver include: small signage, wooden or tile coaster set, tile trivet, picture frame, leather wallet, lazy-susan, and a leather cane holster. This lists just a few and it is anticipated that even more possibilities will come as we are only limited by our *imagination*. Veterans will not be directly operating the laser engraver because of the complexity and inaccessibility of the computer software. However, MS staff will continue to challenge the students' non-visual skills by necessary material preparation and design planning of what is to be etched or engraved.



The Practice of Social Work within Blind Rehabilitation

By Melissa Wilt

When veterans are first admitted to the Central Blind Rehab Center (CBRC), they have a week of orientation and assessment where they get to meet each of their instructors and find out about the individual skill areas. They also meet with other disciplines, including the social worker. It is common for veterans new to the CBRC to wonder why they need to meet with the social worker or they are not sure of the role of social work in the CBRC.



Melissa Wilt, LCSW
Social Worker

Generally speaking, social work practice consists of the application of social work values, principles, and techniques to assist in: helping people obtain tangible services (like benefits or home services), providing individual, family, and group psychotherapy, helping communities provide or improve social and health services, and participating in legislative processes. The practice of social work requires knowledge of human development and behavior, of social, economic, and cultural institutions, and the interaction of all these factors (NASW, 2012). VA is actually the largest employer of social workers with approximately 9000 Masters-prepared social workers

working at every VA throughout the nation.

As the social worker for the CBRC, it is my responsibility to meet with veterans when they are new to the CBRC to complete what we refer to as a psychosocial assessment. This assessment can include information about a veteran's family life, benefits they are receiving, services they are accessing through the VA and their community, housing issues, and advance directives (like Power of Attorney). This assessment would also include how a veteran and their family are adjusting to their vision loss, their mood, and how they are functioning at home. In general, the idea of a psychosocial assessment is to get a better picture of how the veteran and their family are functioning within their environment and if there are gaps that could prevent them from living independently. With this information, a veteran, the other CBRC staff, and I can set goals for how social work services can be of assistance to them while they are in the CBRC. This may include:

- making referrals for community services or housing programs
- linking the Veteran to a Veteran Service Officer to discuss VA benefits and the claim process
- Possibly helping them complete a Power of Attorney or Living Will
- Assisting the veteran and their family with adjusting to the

changes that a vision impairment has had in their lives.

In other words, there are countless ways a social worker can provide assistance and empowerment to the many veterans that we serve!

Sometimes people will say to me "That sounds really hard". It can be, but mostly it is a privilege to work with veterans and their family members. It's fun to learn about their lives and get to know their families through our Family Education Program.

I consider myself a very lucky person to come to work every day (or most days!) and really enjoy what I do. It is satisfying to know that social work interventions can provide the extra piece of blind rehabilitation that will assist people in being able to transition back to their home and community. The hope is that when a veteran is ready to be discharged from the CBRC, they have met their blind rehabilitation goals, so that they can lead a more independent and purposeful life. Social work plays an integral part of this process by offering specialized, mental health, and case management services.

BRC Recreational Outings and Events

By Melissa Winter

Spring is here and summer is just around the corner. At the Blind Center, this means we are getting busy once again with many of our recreational activities outdoors. This year we have already set the dates from May-October to play golf at 16 different locations throughout the Chicago land area.

Speaking of golf, the National Veterans TEE Tournament applications are out! The 18th annual Veterans TEE Tournament is held in Iowa City, Iowa from September 10-September 14, 2012. The TEE Tournament also has horseback riding, bowling, kayaking, and golf lessons from a Pro. The TEE Tournament is the most popular National Event with our Alumni. This is a great opportunity to meet other Hines Alumni and also have a chance to meet up with familiar staff from Hines. If you are interested in attending the TEE and you have not received an application yet, please contact your VIST Coordinator.

The National Veterans TEE Tournament is one of six National Events hosted by the VA. There is also the National Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic, Wheelchair Games, Creative Arts Festival, and the Golden Age Games. In fact, this

year, the Creative Arts Fest was held at Hines VA Hospital on March 20th, and one of our own Blind Center veterans participated by entering one of his paintings. All of these events are great opportunities to get involved with recreational activities and to meet other veterans from other parts of the country. If you are interested in any of these events, please contact your VIST coordinator to get the applications for them.

The Blind Center is gearing up for five different dates this summer to go kayaking down the Chicago River with Great Lakes Adaptive Sports Association in Lake Forest, IL (GLASA) and Adaptive Adventures. Veterans will have options to kayak in a single or tandem kayak to explore Goose Island and some of the Chicago architecture. We will also be going tandem bike riding two times a month on Northerly Island. There will be a group of volunteers who will be the guides on the bikes and take the veterans around the island which is located right on Lake Michigan by Soldier Field and the Planetarium. The summer time is always a great time to get back outdoors again. Look in your hometown to find what activities may be options for you. Contact your local park district or search the VA website under their Sport Club Finder Page to see if there are groups that interest you.

One of our recent graduates from the Blind Center went out to Colorado and went skiing with United Association of

Blind Athletes (USABA). Brian Sullivan just graduated from Hines BRC in February and less than a month later, he found himself skiing down the mountains in Breckenridge, Colorado. Brian hadn't skied in a number of years, but was reintroduced to skiing during his stay with the Blind Center. Brian then filled out the application to go Skiing with USABA and was chosen to be a participant in March.



Two of our other Alumni of the Blind Center went scuba diving with Diveheart in April. Rick Olson and Tonye Devine both went to Key Largo, Florida for 8 days. Tonye was introduced to scuba diving while she was at the blind center at the end of 2011. She then fell in love with scuba and continued to be trained with the assistance of volunteers from Diveheart. On the trip, Tonye did complete the rest of her training so she is now certified to scuba dive in depths up to 60 feet. Tonye did get to experience what it is like diving in a reef in the Atlantic Ocean and feeling

the sand that lays on the bottom of the ocean. She also had a thrill when she felt a shell and it suddenly started moving away from her. Turns out there was a crab that was living inside of it! This experience with scuba diving has really made an impact on Tonye and she felt as though she has been revived again.



Rick Olson has been diving with Diveheart now for about 4 years. On this trip, it was the first time that he had the opportunity to scuba dive with other's who had disabilities. Both Tonye and Rick were guided by an Air Force veteran who is a paraplegic. Rick had commented that he had always wanted to dive with another individual who had a disability, and everything fell into place this time. Rick and Tonye also had the opportunity to dive together. During their dives, all veterans had certified buddies with them to make sure the veterans were never in harm's way.

Rick and Tonye plan to continue to expand on this technique and are already calling it the Devine-Olson Joystick. Read more about this event 1st hand on page 20, in a personal account editorial from Rick Olson.

TORCH GLOWS

By Sarah Baskis

Laura gets married!

Laura
Luckow
(CATS),
now
Laura
Gaynor,
got
married



October 8, 2011. She and her husband Bobby had dated for about four years prior to their engagement. They have known each other for over 11 years, as they dated for a little bit in high school and even attended prom together. They were married at the school church where Laura attended 1st-8th grade and honeymooned in Jamaica. Laura and her husband currently live together in Des Plaines with their dog Wylee. Congrats to Laura and Bobby!

Goodbye...

TCF Intern Ana Williams has moved to the Blind Rehab Center in Cleveland, Ohio. Her last day at Hines was April 4th. Ana will complete her TCF internship in Cleveland and move into a full-time position teaching CATS, O&M and Visual Skills. Ana will be greatly missed by the Hines staff and it was a



Ana Williams

pleasure to have her for the past two years. From Ana: "There is nothing I could say that would be sufficient in thanking ALL of you for the impact you have had on my experience here. You taught and shared so much with me inside the classroom, but it is what I learned from you outside of class that has helped me grow the most. Thank you for your patience, dedication, humor, time, and more than anything, for showing me that I CAN do it."

It's a GIRL!

Chrissy Delbridge (Visual Skills) and her husband, Jim, welcomed their first child, a baby girl. Lauren Elizabeth was born on April 16, 2012 at 12:33am. She weighed 6lbs. and 10oz at birth and was 20 inches long. Congrats to Chrissy and Jim!

Retirements

Mary McKinstry has retired after six years as the Nurse Practitioner in the Blind Center. Mary has been with Hines since 2003 and has dedicated 45 years to the Nursing field. Mary has many wonderful things she is looking forward to in retirement. Mary and her husband, Michael, are avid cyclists and look forward to taking bike trips along with possibly traveling to Europe. Mary loves the outdoors and conserving the environment and she hopes to



Mary McKinstry,
Nurse Practitioner

become a Master Gardener. She also says that she would like to become savvier with technology and volunteer her time. Everyone at the Blind Center wishes Mary well in her retirement; we all know she certainly deserves it!

Melvin Dixon from Housekeeping retired at the end of March 2012 after ten years at the Blind Center. Melvin said he would have liked to work longer, but wants to take his dream vacation to Western Africa while his health still allows. This summer Melvin will be traveling to Western Africa for a full month! Melvin also is looking forward to spending time with his many grand children. Thank you, Melvin, for all of your hard work and dedication to the veterans at the Hines Blind Center. You will be missed!

Debbie Huml is retiring after a 35 year career in Nursing. Her last day will be May 18th. Debbie started her nursing career with 17 years in the Air Force Reserves and has been at the Blind Center since 1988. Debbie says she will be spending more time with her three sons and husband at their summer home in Michigan. After working weekends for so many years, Debbie is looking forward to being there for all birthdays, holidays and special occasions with her family. The staff is sad to see Debbie go, but wishes her a very happy and enjoyable retirement!

Dr. Paul Fedirka, our BRC Psychologist, will be retiring June 30th.

Federal Employee of the Year Awards

The Hines Blind Center is honored to have five nominees for the Federal Employee of the Year. Dr. Paul Fedirka from Psychology, Maggie Elgersma from CATS and Sofaia Kreider from O&M are all nominated for Outstanding Professional Employee. Our Chief, Jerry Schutter, and our Visual Skills Supervisor, Denise Van Koevering, are nominated for Outstanding Supervisory Employee. The awards will be presented on June 6th. Congrats to all the nominees!

Volunteer Recognition Ceremony

by Mary Beth Harrison and Jennifer Molodecki

On April 19th, during National Volunteer Week, Hines VA Hospital celebrated and thanked its 1142 volunteers at a TV Land theme luncheon. Can you imagine that the monetary value of their services exceeds 2.6 million dollars a year? Hard to believe, but we do know that our Blind Center volunteers are priceless!

The Blind Center was well represented at the luncheon by our volunteers and staff, some of whom came dressed with the theme in mind. The BRC group filled (actually over-filled) one table, and we had a lovely

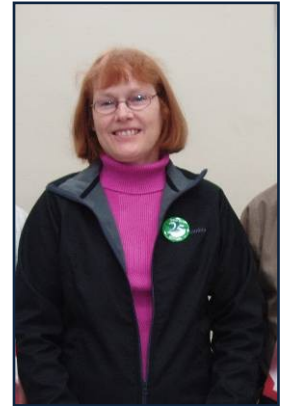
afternoon. Bill ("Mr. Bill") McCloskey was recognized for 750 hours of cumulative service. Youth volunteer Ashley Smith (150 hours) brought her father Scott (O&M Supervisor) as her guest. Mike Capuano was recognized for 500 hours, and Gwen DePinto reached the 1750 hour mark. Tim Korwin reached the 100 hour mark, and we were pleased to have Manual Skills volunteer Bob Rooney, who earned 244 volunteer hours, join us as well. Melody Angelini was in that special recognition category of volunteers who have already reached major milestones and have served at least 100 hours during the previous fiscal year. She was recognized for 13,637 hours over the course of 20 years! Several other BRC volunteers not in attendance were listed in the program book as well.

Rounding out the table were TV-themed staff members Jennifer Molodecki aka Velma (from Scoobydoo), Becky Dennis aka Punky Brewster, and Mary Beth Harrison aka Mary Richards (Mary Tyler Moore). We enjoyed a delicious family style meal and background music including TV theme songs provided by retired Chief of Audiology Barry Klor.

Who's Still Who At the BRC

By Susan Knauff

Cheryl Podgorski has been at Hines Blind Center for 27 years. Her interest in Blind Rehabilitation developed when a college friend (who was studying to be an O&M instructor) told Cheryl that she had the right kind of personality to work with visually impaired people. This friend suggested that Cheryl volunteer with John Turuta at the Michigan Rehabilitation Commission for the Blind where she could gain more workshop experience and learn to teach visually impaired individuals. Cheryl was originally hired in the Manual Skills department at Hines and eventually moved toward the Living Skills area, where she still teaches to this day. Cheryl's favorite things about working at the Blind Center and in Living Skills are that she has different classes to teach and the technology is always changing. "I like to teach typing and computers, whether it be Guide, iPad or the iPhone. I like seeing the veteran's confidence increase when he realizes all of the skills that he has mastered once he completes his training here at the Blind Center."



Outside of work, Cheryl has many interests that keep her occupied. "I love dancing, traveling, photography,

and spending time with my three little Norwich Terriers. When I am not working, I also volunteer at the Rialto Theater in Joliet. I have gotten to see quite a few shows that I normally couldn't afford to buy tickets for." Three of her loves in life are her Norwich Terriers. "Jazz is the little girl – she is 6 years old. She is definitely my sweet little princess. Bucky and Doozy are the two little boys. Doozy is a little high strung, but we love him anyways. Bucky is our loudmouth who we call 'The Nook of the North' as he loves to stand outside for hours in the cold and rainy weather." Although the dogs are her little babies, she has found that they don't care too much for her singing. "I wish I could sing because I just love it, and it makes me happy. Unfortunately, my dogs' ears turn down and they look so unhappy when I attempt to sing." One of Cheryl's goals in life also relates to dogs. "I would like to do some type of volunteer rescue work related to dogs and other animals."

Some of Cheryl's favorite things in life include the movies, "The Shawshank Redemption" and Cary Grant's "Arsenic and Old Lace"; her favorite book is Wolves at My Front Door; her favorite song is "Wonderful Tonight;" her favorite TV shows are "NCIS" and "The Big Bang Theory." If given the chance to meet anyone, Cheryl decided that she would love to meet Eric Clapton who sings "Wonderful Tonight." "I would tell him that I have always loved his music...and ask him

who his favorite artist to perform with was."

One of Cheryl's favorite people is her sister Kathy, who is 13 months older than Cheryl. "She was always a prankster growing up. There are a lot of childhood memories to tell. I usually laugh so hard when we remember these times that my stomach hurts."

Cheryl is a valued staff member to her department and the Blind Center, as she is a hard-worker and very well-liked by the veterans that she teaches and the staff whom with she works. Cheryl has also been a mentor to countless students who have come through the Blind Center for their internships in the Blind Center. Thank you for all of your years of experience!

Computer Corner

By Michael Dugan

Smart Phones; maybe not for everyone?



This is certainly the age of the Smart Phone. With the proliferation of Android and iPhone, an exciting new array of options is available. It is like having a complete computer in the palm of your hand. But are these complicated little beasts for everybody? This article is dedicated to those who want a cell phone just to make calls and get a voice message or two. The possibilities described

below for basic phones may not be all inclusive. But they will give you the idea. *As always, discussion of products does not imply endorsement by the VA or this author.*

Samsung Haven™

AT Guys, a small business out of Kalamazoo, Michigan is now offering the Samsung Haven accessible cell phone. This phone offers talking menus, spoken text for incoming and outgoing messages and adjustable font size. It uses a traditional numeric keypad and comes with a text version of the user manual. Best of all, although it is linked to *Verizon*, no two year contract is required. The cost is \$99 for the phone plus the monthly charge from *Verizon*. For more information go to atguys.com or call (269) 216-4798.

Jitterbug™

The Jitterbug “cell phone for seniors” has been around for a while. This is a low vision phone offering a relatively large LCD display. It uses a traditional keypad. It has an ear cushion, is hearing aid compatible and even uses a dial tone to help the user know when it is ready to make a call. The company, Greatcall, offers plans for the Jitterbug called basic, premium and simply unlimited. Prices range from \$14.99 to \$79.99 per month. The \$79.99 a month simply unlimited plan boasts the unique feature of operator assisted calling. For more information you can contact Greatcall at 1-800-918-8543. A credit or debit card is required. They also

have a thirty day “friendly” return policy if the customer is not satisfied.

K-NFB Reader™

Many Torch readers may already be familiar with the K-NFB Reader. This combines a scanning/reading application with a talking cell phone. With MobileSpeaks from Code Factory built into the phone, it is possible to use one device for both reading machine and cell phone functions. A variety of *Nokia* phones are supported. For more information visit knfbreader.com or call 1-877-547-1500. The K-NFB Reader is sold through a network of resellers. So you may want to ask for a reseller in your area. There is one important caveat regarding MobileSpeaks. Since *Code Factory* is located in Spain, all technical support is handled by email and through a middleman. This means contacting the reseller you purchased the phone from and they in turn contact Code Factory. This can be a time consuming and awkward process. K-NFB Technologies does not support MobileSpeaks or *Nokia* phones. Finally, you will need a wireless plan and monthly charges apply. The average cost of a K-NFB Reader package is approximately \$1,500.

RESOURCES

Veterans Crisis Line

1-800-273-8255

www.veteranscrisisline.net/resources

Having a list of resources to go to when you have a question, problem or just wish to reach out to others is worth its weight in gold. The above listed number and website is a National resource site dedicated to veterans for the purpose of putting them in touch with what and who they need. The contacts at this site reach far and wide. Some of the topics that they offer information on include:

- Connects Veterans, friends and family members with information, resources, and solutions to issues affecting their health, well-being, and everyday lives. Hear inspiring stories of strength. Learn what has worked for other Veterans.
- watch encouraging messages of support
- learn what support is available for homeless Veterans
- resources for Veterans and their loved ones from VA, military, and civilian communities all in the words of Veterans just like you.

Accessible Text books

Non-profit organization that makes books accessible for veterans and others with print-related disabilities; Learning Ally (formerly knkown as

Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic). This is especially helpful to those individuals who are going back to school/college having an increased need for accessible textbooks.

www.LearningAlly.org/veteran

Employment Resources

The following websites offer many sources for employment assistance.

www.acap.army.mil

American Disability Association at

www.adanet.org

Coalition to Salute Hero's at

<http://saluteheroes.org/index.htm>

GI Bill.com at www.gibill.com

Hire Veterans at

www.hireveterans.com

Iraq War Vets Org at

<http://www.iraqwarveterans.org/index.html>

Veteran Benefits Resource Information

4 Military Families at

<http://4militaryfamilies.com>

America Supports You at

<http://www.americasupportsyounil/americasupportsyounil>

GPS and Computer Monthly Discussion Groups; Hines Chapters Veterans Helping Veterans

Just dial the 800 number and when it tells you to put in your access code follow the prompts and you're there.

Computer Support Conference Call

Date: First Thursday of every month
Time: 10:00 to 10:50 am (CDT)
Conference call in number:
1-800-767-1750 Access Code 44125

GPS Support Conference Call

Date: First Tuesday of every month
Time : 10:00 to 10:50 am (CDT)
Conference call in number:
1-800-767-1750 Access code 44125

If you would like to be included in the e-mail reminders on the calls, which include agenda topics, please send an E-mail to:

Richard Olson:
rwoverna1@sbcglobal.net

Please include your name, contact information and which group you would like to be added to.

An Inspiration to All

By Keely Moran

Though he struggles daily he is determined to learn to read and spell again.

A United States Marine Corp veteran, from Illinois, C. Schubert, had experienced challenges



in his life that many of us cannot even begin to imagine. In 1988 this veteran had surgery to remove a brain tumor from the left hemisphere. In 1999 he experienced a stroke that resulted in a visual impairment, a seizure disorder and drastic change in his language skills. From that moment on he would experience what doctors call a right homonymous hemianopsia, or, right field loss on the same side of both of his eyes. In addition the veteran faced the challenge of dealing with two huge communication barriers Aphasia and Anomia. These conditions make it very difficult to read even a single two letter word, spell, and speak. Additionally he experiences two to three petite mal seizures a day. Though he struggles daily he is determined to learn to read and spell again.

In January of 2011 when he came to the Hines Blind Rehabilitation Center program he came with minimal goals;

however he was interested in learning to type in order to use a computer. He was able to use the SARA OCR to relearn speech and reading skills which aided him to get instructions and words to practice on the keyboard. After practicing typing for a year he returned to the BRC in January 2012 for computer training. He learned how to use the accessible software program called Guide™ which allowed him to increase the magnification and use the audio output to read what was on the screen. The spell-check feature of the program was also very beneficial in helping him to successfully write letters and emails to his instructors and family. Since the veteran struggled with visually identifying letters when attempting to read; his instructors explored Braille to tactually identify letters to improve his reading skills. The veteran was able to tactually read letters in Braille, type them into the computer, and then use the voice output of the Guide software to audibly identify what that word was. Though he is still challenged and struggles, this has improved his overall reading and comprehension skills. Learning Braille has assisted a visual learner to start reading again.

Letters from Our Graduates

The following letters were received from Hines Blind Center Graduates.



“When I first contracted macular degeneration back in 2004, I was 79 years of age, and really in good health and enjoying retirement. I was playing basketball at a local gym, swimming and working out with weights, and participating in lots of social activities. Now, all of a sudden, my little world was going to dramatically change!”

After many doctor visits, eye injections, etc., I realized that my sight was going to do nothing but get worse. I became very depressed and kept thinking why did this have to happen to me? No more driving, so I lost my independence. No more basketball or need to go to sporting events I became more depressed, and would stay in my den and didn't want to talk to anyone. Even though my brother was in a wheelchair, and another relative suffering terribly with neuropathy, I still could not get over feeling sorry for myself. A good friend of mine tried to talk me into contacting the Blind Center at the VA Hines Hospital, and after a month of “bugging”, I finally agreed to just go in and talk with them. To my surprise, I was so impressed that I agreed to enter into their program.. That decision really changed my whole life! After entering the program I became friends with many other vets, but one particular guy was a 23year old ex-Marine named Gary, who was a platoon leader in Iraq. He and four of his men hit a roadside bomb, and all were killed but him. He was blinded completely, and his entire body was

riddled with shrapnel. Doctors wanted to amputate both of his legs, but he refused to let them.

Gary was very interested in WWII battles, and especially bombers like the B-17s and B-24s. Since I was a tail gunner on a B-24 in the 8th Air Corps in England, he had me cornered, asking a million questions about missions that we had flown, etc.. Anyway, we became friends, and I had the opportunity to learn a lot about Gary. Here was a 23 year old kid that was never going to see again, and displayed much more optimism than most people with no handicap at all! All he could talk about was the things he was going to do when he returned to his dad's farm in Michigan. He had plan after plan about all the changes he was going to make to improve the farm in order to get more and better crops. And his outlook on life generally was unreal! Everything he talked about was positive. And all I could think about was how a kid this young, who would never see again, could have such a positive outlook on life! In no time at all, I changed my outlook, too. And I really felt embarrassed about how selfish I had been in terms of feeling sorry for myself, etc... Now, in retrospect, it was like God had placed Gary in my path in order to help me.

There is no question that my stay at the Hines VA Hospital Blind Center was an experience I will never forget. All of the staff was so professional and really cared about each veteran

personally. What I learned there was invaluable in having to adjust to a new life style when I got back home. But perhaps the most valuable experience from my stay at Hines was having the opportunity to meet and become friends with so many other veterans--- --especially that wonderful guy named Gary from Michigan. He was instrumental in my changing my attitude about how I was going to handle the rest of my life! While we parted ways, this ex-Marine will always be in my thoughts, heart and prayers.

John Bright, Plainfield, IL

"No superlatives are enough to tell you how much your work has meant to me. On a scale of 1-10 you rate an 11. You have lit a candle in our window of blindness."

Newburgh, IN

The following editorial was written by the same veteran and has been published.

Fading Glory

By Lew Otterson

BRC patient Mr. Lew Otterson offers this tribute to those who participated in the last global conflict.



You see them-these old, sorta funny-looking men, you see them

at the VA Clinic.....A host of big guts, furrowed faces, balding domes, bandy legs and, sometimes, no legs at all. They come for their routine physicals. And to renew their rights to get their veterans' medicine for nearly free. If you ask, most will tell you they served in World War II. In the Marines, the Army, the Navy, or maybe the Coast Guard. But that's about all they will say. These old guys don't look very imposing now. Most have passed miles beyond worrying about fad or style; even they will admit that they are far, far over the hill. Most folks don't even notice them at all; even when they do, they see them as men who maybe never measured up to much in the world of today.

But wait, look again, study them, one by one. See that fellow there, the one who could do with a shave, he just happens to be one of the tank drivers, who came ashore in the first wave of Normandy. That one there, over by the TV, wearing short-shorts and obviously proud of his strong legs, he has two Purple Hearts; one for Tarawa and another for Kwajalein. He drew the burial detail, fighting off the blowflies and the stench, two days after the killing stopped at Iwo. Then there's Johnny, that big guy over there, coming through the door in a wheelchair. He was a POW, captured at Bastogne. All these years later, he still is fulfilling a promise he made to himself, to eat steak every day, come hell or high cholesterol; the German stalag diet taught him the value of food. And that skinny little guy in

jeans and "Rock City" t-shirt, both too tight, he's the one who finally had to write 'that' letter to the family of his buddy, Babe. Babe, who had been smashed dead by a tank on Bataan. The problem was, he had waited more than 50 years after the event to get the letter sent. So now, in the year 2001, he finally writes to the Post- Master of Babe's home town. "Please pass this letter on if you know any of Babe's kin," he says. He just had to tell what a great guy Babe had been, how he had died, and how much he missed him through all of those years. He said he had promised Babe he would write his family if Babe didn't make it back. His promise finally fulfilled, he had lived up to his word. These are the dogfaces, the tail gunners, the swabbies, the Marines, the men who went to that 'greatest of wars,' and maybe a WAAC and a nurse or two. All grown old. But, they still remember the blood on the sand, the kamikaze, the knee-deep water in the freezing foxhole, the still and stiff bodies in the blood-splotched snow. The dead buddies and the blood. Maybe they don't appear to be so much now, but, stop, for a minute, send up a thankful prayer, for these fading veterans you see at the clinic, who once toiled and suffered, and bled-and sometimes cried. For it was they, together with the long-ago dead, they are the ones who forged that awesome crimson line.

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April 2001

Another submission by a Hines Blind Center Veteran includes a poem about Hines Blind Center. He writes...

This Is The Blind Rehab Center

By Richard Williams

Are you a veteran with failing sight?
Do you know one who suffers from
this plight?
Please pay attention-this is meant for
you.
There is a program where you earn
your due.

This program aims to take you off the
shelf,
And make you see and feel good of
yourself,
This program is uniquely framed from
one,
And you're the one-you see that when
you're done.

You are examined, nothing cogent
missed.
But, naturally, there is a waiting list.
Take my advice, if you have doubts at
all,
It still won't hurt to have you make the
call.

This is the Blind Rehab Center at
Hines.
Its program is of marvelous design.
Don't miss it-there is nothing like it
near;
With just a phone call, there is naught
to fear.

Just look it up, it's on the internet.
But, like I said, just call, you're sure to
get
The info that you need to have your
see
A richer life that you yourself can be.

©Richard Williams

HEALTHY LIVING

Better food choices, better results

Pasta supposedly makes you fat,
right? Well, Italians eat an estimated
60 pounds of pasta per year, but only
10 to 20 percent of Italian adults are
obese. Americans, on the other hand,
chow down only 20 pounds of pasta
each year, and a full third of us are
obese. Part of the reason: Butter,
cream, oil, large portion sizes. Avoid
these starchy travesties and you'll be
able to enjoy pasta without the
waistline side-effects.

- Alfredo sauce
Considered the buzzkill of the pasta
world. Its cream, butter, and/or oil
base turns any pasta dish into a full-
fat assault on your waistline. Tomato-
based sauces are usually lighter than
cream- and oil-based options, making
them your best bet when it comes to
pasta toppers.
- Swapping processed grains for
whole grains

Multigrain angel hair pasta, tomatoes, and grilled chicken provide the pasta fix without the negative waistline side-effects. Below is a healthy pasta recipe following these tips Courtesy of www.diabeticgourmet.com

Easy Pantry Tuna and Penne

- 1 box [Dreamfields Penne Rigate](#)
- 1-1/2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 can (14.5 ounces) crushed tomatoes in juice
- 1-1/2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon capers, drained (optional)
- 1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- 2 cans (5 ounces each) water-packed tuna, drained

Directions

1. Cook pasta according to package directions. Drain and return to pan.
2. Meanwhile, heat oil in large skillet over medium heat. Add onion and garlic; cook 1 to 2 minutes until onion becomes translucent, stirring constantly (watch carefully so garlic does

not burn). Stir in tomatoes with juice, parsley, lemon juice and capers. Cook 1 minute; add red pepper flakes to taste.

3. Reduce heat to medium-low; cook 3 to 5 minutes to thicken sauce, stirring frequently. Gently stir in tuna; heat through.
4. Add pasta to sauce. Stir gently to coat.

Nutritional Information (Per Serving)

Calories:	312
Protein:	19 g
Sodium:	248 mg
Cholesterol:	16 mg
Fat:	6 g
Saturated Fat:	1 g
Dietary Fiber:	7 g
Digestible Carbohydrates:	13 g

News From the H.B.C.A.

Rick Olson, a veteran of the Vietnam War era, lost his sight in 2003 due to ischemic optic neuropathy. He thanks his mobility and independence largely to his guide dog Verna. Rick is the president of the Hines VA Blind Center Alumni, and Secretary of Illinois Regional Group of the Blinded Veterans. In addition to scuba diving and being a spokesperson for Diveheart, Rick surfs, skis, fishes, bikes, golfs and goes kayaking. He offers his personal account of the most recent Diveheart Scuba-diving trip to Florida this Spring. Diveheart is an Illinois-based not-for-profit organization that provides scuba diving opportunities to children and adults with disabilities, and wounded veterans. Diveheart was awarded free round-trip airline tickets from Southwest Airlines, for a scuba diving trip to the Florida Keys, for families of fallen troops, and wounded veterans. Rick Olson, an avid Diveheart participant, traveled with the group and in the following story, shares his recollections.

I've gone on wonderful diving trips with Diveheart before, all of which have changed my life.

I usually start out by thanking those who made any trip a reality, but I would like to first thank my new additional family. In just seven days, they became a part of me and mine and I know that I'm a part of them also. I'm talking about the Gold Star

trip to scuba dive in Florida with Diveheart. The Gold Star Families are people just like anyone else with one important distinction. The Gold Star Families have all lost a family member due to the war. The Gold Star members who traveled with us to the Florida Keys are fathers, mothers, a wife, children, a sister and an uncle of several fallen troops.

The trip also included a group of veterans. We too had an important distinction; we all have physical disabilities. Another veteran and I are both blind, a third veteran is paralyzed and in a wheelchair.

What drew us together for the trip aside from our deep connection to the military is the fact that we have all endured a loss. All of our lives have changed dramatically and irreversibly and we are all seeking to live with what we call our new normal.

I've gone on wonderful diving trips with Diveheart before, all of which have changed my life. However the Gold Star Family Trip exceeded my expectations and was the most impactful of all. The scuba diving was some of the best that I have done but it was the camaraderie between everyone including the children that set the trip above any that I've taken with Diveheart. We all laughed, cried, and most of all listened to each others' stories. We shared. I feel that we also healed a bit together as well.

During the trip I learned some lessons, perhaps the most important of which, was to listen. Gold Star Family members talked about their tragic losses, and I learned that there is nothing in my life to which I can compare their loss, no words of comfort that I can provide, nothing I can say to fix things. What helps them most is to be able to reminisce about their loved ones and share their memories, and to tell them that I am so sorry for their loss.

I also received recognition for what we're calling the joy stick maneuver; something that I've worked on with Diveheart volunteer Julio Garcia for three years. The joy stick gives me the most freedom that I can have while scuba diving and will do the same for other divers. With my fingers interlocked with my dive buddy, I can signal and receive signals, allowing us to communicate underwater. Prior to this, my buddy would hold my hand or grab my wrist and pull to help guide me. This provides more independence and will work with any diver, disabled or able-bodied. There were a couple of times that I thought my mask was leaking water and I would clear it, but after getting out, I found that it was not salt water but tears of joy from having this amazing experience diving with Gold Star Families and veterans. I will be forever grateful for the memories that I hold in my heart and in my mind. Wishing everyone the best and looking to diving with everyone again in the future. God Bless.

Audio Version Ends with this Issue; a Reminder to our Readers

This is the final TORCH issue that will be produced in an audio format. Please consider one of the alternate versions so you can continue to keep current on the Blind Center at Hines. Mailed printed copy, in which a variety of devices can be used to read, (scanner, SARA, KNFB readers) or e-mail version in which we will be sending the link to our e-mail listing for you to access on our website.

Thanks is extended to our Blind Center Staff for recording the audio version for so many years.



C.B.R.C. TORCH



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**FREE MATTER FOR THE BLIND
& PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED
POSTAL MANUAL PART 135**